Title:'Idea of the Nation' in the Works of Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala

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The trend of Indian novelists writing in English developed and flourished all through the Gandhian age. The social, political and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement influenced Indian English Literature and led to the emergence of an entire school of women novelists, among whom Kamala Markandaya and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala are undoubtedly the leading figures. As novelists they belong to the Post- Independence period, a period during which attention had already been turned away from the past to contemporary issues and all leading novelists were concentrating on the problems the society was facing at large. Nationalism, partition, poverty, peasantry, subjugated women, rural-urban divide, East-West encounter, feudal practices and communalism were some of the themes quite close to their heart.

Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) was born in Mysore and achieved a B.A. degree from Madras University, but moved to Britain after India gained Independence from British rule in 1947. Markandaya's first novel *Nectar in a Sieve* was published in 1955 and went on to become a bestseller. Her ten novels show her sensitive representation of a remarkable range of individual characters which are simultaneously representative of a larger collective. The conflict between tradition and modernity, East and West is more or less found in all her novels.

On the other hand, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (1927-2013) was born of Polish Jewish parents in Germany and educated in England where she gained an M.A. degree at the London University. However, she married an Indian architect, CSH Jhabvala, moved to India in 1951 and lived here for twenty five years at a stretch. Like Kamala Markandaya, Jhabvala's first novel *To Whom She will* was also published in 1955. This was followed by *The Nature of Passion* (1956), *Esmond in India* (1958), *The Householder* (1960), *Get Ready for Battle* (1962), *A Backward Place* (1965), *An Experience of India* (1971), *A New Dominion* (1972) and *Heat and Dust* (1975). In 1976, she left India. Jhabvala's background and lineage gives rise to questions about whether she can really be included among Indian women novelists of the Post-Independence period. It is precisely the same fact which has made me feel that Jhabvala would be the right person to present a face of India which will perhaps be in contrast to that portrayed by Kamala Markandaya. Jhabvala may not be an Indian by birth, but she has lived in India for a long time which has given her the opportunity to closely observe the changing milieu of post independent India. Her marriage to an Indian brought her in close proximity to various segments of Indian social life enabling her a special insight into the idea of India as a nation.

The word 'nation' carries varying meanings, and the connotation of the term has changed over time. Early thinkers like Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson were of the opinion that nations are not "natural entities" (Ashcroft 150). In fact, Anderson having made a detailed study

of South East Asia, has gone so far as to call the nation "an imagined political community" (because the members cannot possibly know each other) which is both "inherently limited and sovereign" (5-6). The idea may be "imagined", thus having an unstable foundation, yet it "makes it possible…for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imagining" (Anderson 23). It therefore becomes one of the strongest weapons with which colonial societies have offered resistance to the imperial control. It has enabled post-colonial societies to "invent a self-image" (Ashcroft 117) through which such societies could liberate themselves from imperial control and domination. Out of such anti-imperialist struggles, nations were born. The 'nation' itself is a ground for dispute and debate and "a site for the competing imaginings of different ideological and political interests" (Loomba 207). Hugh Seton-Watson concluded from his exhaustive study of nations and states that "there is no 'scientific' means of establishing what all nations have in common" (qtd. Ashcroft 128). Thus it is not possible to give any "scientific definition" of the nation (Anderson 46).

From the point of view of literary theory, nationalism has garnered surprising interest supposedly because its rise is equally extensive in time, range and sense with the most dominant modern literary form, that is, the novel. Though, Anderson opines that it was the "coalition between Protestantism and print-capitalism" (40) that made it possible to "think" the nation (28), it was especially the novel "as a composite but clearly bordered work of art" that was most crucial in "defining the nation as an 'imagined community'" (Brennan 129).

The discourse of nation, nationalism and its derivatives has become inseparable from literature. However, the literature produced as part of a cultural nationalistic project is a literature produced "in opposition to the narratives and representations which deny dignity and autonomy to those who have been colonized" (Innes 120). Examples of expression of the self has found its place in novels, poetry, songs etc. In fact, the Indian government that had come to power after Independence in 1947 was remarkable for its literary talent. President Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, C.J. Rajagopalachari have produced works in English still revered for their exemplary quality. India's three significant novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan also contributed to providing a new perspective to India as a nation through an 'alien' language. Chinua Achebe asks: "Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling." (qtd. Thiong'o 263). Markandaya, educated in the coloniser's language, and Jhabvala, fleeing from Germany to Britain and compelled to speak in English, may echo the same feelings.. In India, since the colonized intellectuals had had their education in the coloniser's language, they became heirs to a culture in which Indian and British elements were intermingled. It formed not only their minds but the mind of the whole generation. But the important question here is whether the English language has been able to bear the weight of the two novelists' Indian experience.

Kamala Markandaya, being a steady traditionalist, transmuted the different phases of national experience into significant works of art. The essentially traditional Indian life forms the basis of all her novels. The impact of the modern urban culture, technology and industrialisation brought in by the British threatens this Indian life. The East-West encounter also takes the form of a direct relationship between Indian and British characters. Markandaya's first novel, *Nectar in a Sieve* presents how post-independence, industry and modern technology (in the form of a

tannery) invade the life of peasants and destroy the peace and morality of the countryside. Her second novel, *Some Inner Fury* is primarily a political novel dealing with the straining of human relationships in the wake of Quit India Movement. *A Silence of Desire* depicts the conflict between Indian spiritual faith and modernism. *Possession* seems to be a continuation of *A Silence of Desire,* dealing with the conflict between Indian spiritualism and western materialism. *A Handful of Rice* and *Two Virgins*, covertly show how the modernism brought in by the western influence inspires the protagonists to revolt against their traditional environment. In *The Coffer Dams*, Markandaya deals with the theme of the East-West encounter from a different aspect by presenting the conflict between technological power and the forces of Nature symbolized by a turbulent South Indian river.A new dimension is given to the theme of East-West confrontation in *The Nowhere Man* where the predicament of Indian immigrants in England is shown. *The Golden Honeycomb* is a chronicle of three generations of the royal family of Devapur. Her next novel *Pleasure City*, published in India under the name *Shalimar*, is a contemporary examination of the meaning of progress.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala portrays the cosmopolitan life in India. She takes an amused look at arranged marriages in India and presents an ironic survey of the East-West confrontation. Her early novels *To Whom She Will* and *The Nature of Passion* are exquisite comedies of urban middle–class life in India in the 1950's and 1960's. Jhabvala gives much importance to the contemporary social milieu. She describes India as a country where one must be morally blind in order to survive. She divides her characters into two groups- the seekers and the sufferers. V.S. Naipaul observes about Jhabvala that she is "the only writer who, while working from within the society, is yet able to impose on it a vision which is an acceptable type of comment" (qtd. Cronin 204).

My intention is to find out the idea of the nation that the two novelists, Kamala Markandaya (an Indian by birth) and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala (an insider who nevertheless accepted India as her own after marriage) build, in their respective novels.

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